

Kontakte program notes 2009:

PROGRAM

1. Pimmon

Paul Gough: electronic music

2. Pimmon and Ensemble Offspring Improvisation

Paul Gough–electronic music, Jason Noble–clarinet, James Cuddeford–violin & Claire Edwardes–percussion

- interval -

3. Karlheinz Stockhausen: Kontakte (1960)

Bernadette Balkus–piano, Claire Edwardes–percussion & Bob Scott–sound projection

PERFORMERS

Paul Gough–electronic music

Claire Edwardes–percussion

Bernadette Balkus–piano

Jason Noble–clarinet

James Cuddeford–violin

Bob Scott–sound projection

PROGRAM NOTES

Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kontakte* is a seminal work. Written between 1958-60, *Kontakte* is influential not only for its contribution to the development of a revolutionary new medium of music – electronic music – but also for its integration of electronic music with acoustic music.

The title *Kontakte* refers to points of contact between electronic and acoustically derived sounds and acts as a motto for this evening's concert: a performance that will bring together Ensemble Offspring, a group of musicians primarily working in the realm of acoustic music into contact with Pimmon (Paul Gough), a musician working in the field of electronic music.

The techniques of constructing electronic music employed by Stockhausen exactly 50 years ago – arduous processes of splicing and reassembling magnetic tape – may seem light-years away from the digital technologies available to today's electronic musicians. However, contemporary electronic techniques such as 'granulation' – the microscopic looping and reordering of sound samples – are not entirely removed and are a prominent aspect of the musical language of tonight's featured artist Pimmon.

Pimmon's music is dense but delicate. Using intuitive processes, Pimmon builds layer upon layer of sonic textures to create a fluctuating slab of sound. Despite the complex monolithic quality, his works are surprisingly understated. He eschews excessively dramatic or attention-demanding gestures, rather gently inviting the listener into a world of seemingly infinite detail. Unlike much complex music which takes concentrated listening to digest and

demystify, with Pimmon, it almost seems the other way round: the harder you listen the more complex and intriguing it gets.

Like many electronic music artists in the age of sampling, Pimmon's soundworlds are built out of the sounds of others. However, unlike sample genres such as Hip-hop or Oswald's Plunderphonics whose music finds meaning in the recognition of familiar sounds in unfamiliar contexts, Pimmon's use of pre-existing sound is deliberately obscure. While it is often possible to discern the aura of a former music in Pimmon's textures (and an album title such as *Smudge Another Yesterday* suggests its presence), his music does not depend on the recognition of these sounds as integral to the musical experience. Rather, Pimmon microscopically scrutinizes the sounds of others – filtering and deconstructing – to discover curious new resonances and timbres and tease out innate but fresh qualities.

The subtlety by which Pimmon 'plays' his 'found sounds' is not dissimilar to the way in which an improvising instrumentalist may investigate the string of a violin or explore a found object to search out its sonic potential and inherent beauty. Indeed it is this free investigative approach to sound that forms the basis of the second part of tonight's program, an improvisation involving Pimmon on laptop and Ensemble Offspring musicians Claire Edwardes on percussion, Jason Noble on clarinet and James Cuddeford on violin. In some ways, this work is the unofficial *Contacts* of tonight's program: musicians from entirely different musical traditions coming together in the one musical space and four dissimilar instruments (electronic and acoustic) seeking points of sonic contact in performance. It should be noted, however, that despite the different backgrounds and different means of producing sound, there is one important artistic point of contact that was established well before the collaboration: a shared appetite for new musical experiences.

Stockhausen's initial conception of *Kontakte* was also to have musicians improvising to the electronic tape part, although he later abandoned the idea for the written-out version that is performed tonight. Stockhausen gleaned many insights into the nature of sound from his early experiments in electronic music. Pitch and rhythm, for example, could both be viewed simply as vibrations in time: that is a continuous spectrum where pitch could be considered very fast rhythm or rhythm as very slow pitch. At approximately the centre of the work, this nexus is tangibly demonstrated: a synthesized tone emerges and meanders downwards to 16 cycles per second – a threshold or point of 'contact' between perceiving the sound as a very low pitch or as a fast periodic rhythm. As the impulses continue to draw out the piano introduces a low E, approximately the same tone as originally found in the electronic part illuminating another point of contact as the musical structure is passed from the speakers to the live musicians.

These contacts between aspects of music that would typically be treated separately by the composer inform much of the structuring of the work and reflect the prevailing aesthetic of total serialization. That is, by drawing on fundamental points of contact, Stockhausen could uniformly control all the elements of music under one overarching logic.

Kontakte is also noted as an example of Stockhausen's 'moment form': a concept of structuring time that largely negates a narrative reading of music. Moment form focuses on the present moment and rejects music as a sequence of linear cause and effect relationships. Although 'moment form' and improvisation may share a certain in-the-moment aesthetic, Stockhausen's concept treats structural blocks of music as discreet 'gestalt' events that exist in relation only to themselves and not their neighbours. He writes: "Each moment... is individual and self-regulated, and able to sustain an independent existence... moments are not merely

consequents of what precedes them and antecedents of what follows; rather than concentration on the Now -- on every Now -- as if it were a vertical slice dominating over any horizontal conception of time and reaching into timelessness, which I call eternity: an eternity which does not begin at the end of time, but is attainable at every moment."

Stockhausen's unique musical vision, his ceaseless enquiry into the very nature of sound and his prolific output – culminating in the monumental opera cycle *Licht* – have made him one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century. His sheer originality and invention have also seen his influence transcend the boundaries of the classical art-music tradition and inspire generations of popular musicians particularly in the sphere of electronic music (numerous DJs reverentially reference the electronic part of *Kontakte* in their mixes). Almost two years after Stockhausen's death *Kontakte* remains one of Stockhausen's classics and still sounds striking almost a half-century after it was composed.

"I meet regularly works which sample from my works, and then even transform it to such a degree that I think "Hm... that sounds like...Kontakte", but you see, they can transpose it or you can make out of a two-second sound a sound of twenty seconds. These days these transforming devices go very far, so in the future Kontakte should remain as it is, as a result of a historical moment... but for new works... I cannot live long enough to realize what I have in my head; what should be done; what I want to do, what concerns composition of space movements and in particular also the transformation technique of known sounds literally sampled from the world..." (Stockhausen)

Notes by Damien Ricketson

MUSICIAN BIOGRAPHIES

Ensemble Offspring

Ensemble Offspring is dedicated to the performance of innovative new music. The ensemble is committed to a living classical-music tradition combining classic 20th century repertoire with new work of our time. With over 13 years experience, Ensemble Offspring is about fostering innovative thinking. Through more than 100 performances the Ensemble has consistently promoted artistic integrity, open-mindedness and challenged the way musicians and audiences think about music. The Ensemble doesn't shy away from demanding repertoire but aims to present such repertoire in a stimulating, inclusive and accessible fashion via unique programming, performance excellence, education and inventive presentation. Highlights have included a European tour as guests of the prestigious Warsaw Autumn Festival, appearances at the Sydney Film Festival, the Canberra International Music Festival, the Sydney Opera House and Melbourne Recital Centre. Ensemble Offspring is directed by Damien Ricketson and Claire Edwardes.

Paul Gough (Pimmon)

Pimmon is the alias for electronic composer Paul Gough. Paul has forged an international reputation for creating dense, challenging and engaging electronic music. Characterized by a unique mixture of drone and glitch-based digital soundscapes, Paul has recorded for various international labels including Tigerbeat6 and Fat Cat. His most recent release, Smudge

Another Yesterday (2009, Preservation), was mastered by renowned Italian composer Giuseppe Ielasi. Paul has collaborated with artists including Fennesz, Oren Ambarchi, Keith Rowe and Ensemble Offspring. Paul also hosts ABC Radio National's Quiet Space and Paul's Play Lunch on FBi.

Claire Edwardes

Percussionist, Claire Edwardes, is a leading interpreter of contemporary classical music and together with Damien Ricketson is the Co-Artistic Director of Ensemble Offspring. Performance highlights have included solo concerto appearances with the Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland Orchestras and the Radio Chamber Orchestra (The Netherlands) as well as solo festival appearances at the Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music (UK) and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music (Townsville). She was awarded an AMC/APRA award for outstanding contribution to Australian music (2007), was the recipient of the MCA Freedman Fellowship (2005) and named Australian Young Performer of the Year (1999).

Bernadette Balkus

Bernadette Balkus is one of Australia's most versatile pianists. She collaborates with many of Australia's leading classical musicians and embraces a wide-ranging repertoire from the traditional to the contemporary. Bernadette has performed regularly for Musica Viva and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and is a core member of the Sydney Soloists. Bernadette has had many new works written for her and given Australian premieres of international composers such as Kevin Putts and Harrison Birtwistle. Bernadette was the Artistic Director of the Australian Women's Music Festival and is currently the Artistic Director of the Freshwater Festival of Chamber Music.

James Cuddeford

James Cuddeford has performed throughout Europe, Asia and Australia as both a soloist and chamber musician. He has performed concertos with orchestras including the Camerata Lysy Switzerland, BBC Scottish National, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Queensland, Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras. As a chamber musician he performed with the Grainger Quartet, the Sydney Soloists and the Australian String Quartet. James is highly active interpreter of contemporary music and his own compositions have been performed by groups such as the Nash Ensemble, Psappha Ensemble and the Queensland Philharmonic.

Jason Noble

Jason Noble is a freelance clarinetist specialising in contemporary repertoire. He has performed at prestigious festivals such as the Warsaw Autumn, Aldeburgh (UK), Sydney Spring Festival, and Sydney Film Festival. As both a soloist and chamber musician Jason has appeared with Ensemble Offspring, Sonic Art Ensemble, Halcyon Ensemble, Synergy, and Sydney Children's Choir. Recent projects have included the award winning Narakulawala, a collaboration with the Women's indigenous choir of the Tiwi people, where he has toured Darwin and the Piwi islands. Jason also lectures for the Musicology faculty at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Bob Scott

Bob Scott is a versatile and experienced sound designer and recording engineer. He has produced live sound for Nigel Kennedy, Ensemble Modern, the Sydney Symphony, the Sydney Opera House and many new music ensembles. Bob is currently writing the music for Alexandra Harrison's dance production *Dark, Not too Dark* and creating the sound design for Opera Australia's upcoming production of *Bliss*.